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Introduction
Rethinking the Baroque

Helen Hills

The baroque is a thorn in the flesh of European art and thought, the grit in the oyster of art history. Within art history in recent years, the term 'baroque' has been delegitimized, ostensibly because it had no contemporary usage in the period to which it was subsequently applied.[1] It is frequently treated on one hand as an inherently 'anachronistic' term and therefore to be avoided; and on the other as a stylistic term steeped in negative connotations, denoting immodest excess, moral dubiousness, the supposed insubstantiality of rich ornament, dangerous emotional indulgence, the wilfully bizarre, pernicious caprice, and bad taste. Many have opted instead for the term 'early modern'. But this term is doubly problematic in implying not only a conception of history as smoothly linear, but of the earlier period in subordinate and teleological relation to the 'modern'. Yet some scholars – Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, Hubert Damisch and Christine Buci-Glucksmann – have explored a baroque that is neither pejorative nor 'early modern', seeing it not as decadent so much as its antidote, not as an essence, still less as an etymological problematic.[2] Significantly, these scholars have come mostly from outside art and architectural history. This book aims at a reconsideration of baroque in relation to the visual arts, particularly architecture, while avoiding simple forms of periodization. It investigates what happens if we resist a conceptualization of art history as linear periodization to think of baroque as 'a conceptual technology' that does not simply allow retrospective understanding but actually provokes new forms of historical conceptualization and interpretation.

The shrinking from the term 'baroque' within art history is a particularly striking phenomenon, because the idea of the baroque was foundational in the very formation of the discipline of art history itself and, indeed, the concept of style within it. From Jacob Burckhardt and Heinrich Wölfflin on, baroque

has been peculiarly complicit with the conceptualization, justification and deployment of style within art history, especially with regard to architecture. It is that peculiar complicity of baroque with style, together with its instability with regard to period and periodization, along with its mercurial reworkings by Benjamin and Deleuze, that render it such a redolent and provocative term, and one so significantly ripe for reconsideration.

This book, therefore, works to retrieve the baroque from the margins of art history and to engage it for use in art and architectural historical studies and theory. It aims to problematize easy forms of periodization by using complex notions of historical time in relation to 'baroque'. Unlike the work of most of the scholars mentioned above, this book focuses avidly on architecture and the visual arts, and the histories of architecture and art to formulate its principal concerns. It is with baroque as illegitimate and invasive presence in the unperturbed past, which is imagined and necessitated by a history aimed at 'recuperation', and with baroque as mode of organization or system that this book is concerned. Consequently, it is towards baroque as idea (as opposed to concept) in Benjamin's sense of the terms that this book turns.[3]

Recently there has been a resurgence of interest in the term 'baroque' in relation to system, style and period.[4] Most scholars who have espoused the idea of the baroque, inspired in particular by the work of Gilles Deleuze, and especially by *Le Pli*, have been modernists and theorists engaged in the analysis of contemporary culture, particularly architecture and entertainment.[5] Most of the scholars concerned have little knowledge of the art, literature and history of the period usually associated with the baroque. A gulf has arisen. On the one hand, there are scholars who are deeply immersed in historical period, who shy away from abstraction, and who have remained either oblivious to the productivity of the term 'baroque' or nervous of its instability; on the other, there are theorists and scholars of contemporary culture who have largely ignored baroque art and architecture.[6] This book is designed to explore what happens when these worlds mesh. Thus it is posited on the idea that tension is not only inevitable, but even desirable, since it not only encapsulates important intellectual divergence, but helps to push scholars (and therefore readers) outside their usual runnels. It is formulated to prompt a reconsideration of the baroque in light of emerging ideas. Can theoretical ideas be usefully turned back onto the art and architecture of the period traditionally formulated as 'baroque'? What are the prizes and penalties of doing so? For the modernists, baroque is usually formulated in terms of the light it sheds on something termed *modernity* – that is, as a forward-looking address in relation to period. But what of a backward-looking address that is not simply retrospective, one that refuses to see as significant in the past only those aspects which received either contemporaneous recognition or some later more auspicious embodiment? What of an address that engages those aspects that have been more particularly or more profoundly 'lost'? This book has been conceived to permit consideration of how such work might affect thinking in relation to artwork conventionally termed 'baroque'.

While recent scholarship has tended to seek to recuperate baroque for contemporary concerns, this book is interested in mobilizing baroque in relation to the historical – beyond the periodized. Here scholars from a range of disciplines address these issues. Thus the book aims to disrupt conventional narratives of periodization within art history in relation to 'baroque'. In doing so it contributes to the elaboration of historical and theoretical paradigms that enable different understandings of architectural and theoretical practice, rather than simply providing further information for period-based art and architectural history.

The essays offered here reconsider the usefulness of the term 'baroque', while avoiding rehearsing a familiar policing of periodization, stylistic boundaries and stylistic categories or essence. The book is not intended to either provide a survey of baroque as a chronological or geographical conception, or to 'cover' the disciplines which could be described as having a stake in the baroque (for example, music, history, literature, history of art, and so on).[7] Instead it draws together essays by scholars from diverse backgrounds and intellectual formations in order to set up a dialogue across what remains a sharp divide between early modern empiricism and theoretical concerns. The tone and scope of the book is, therefore, hybrid and transdisciplinary, with scholars from history of art, history of architecture, philosophy, modern languages and literature addressing a subject which intersects with all these disciplines, both empirically and theoretically.

The volume is not intended simply as a revisionist study from within baroque art history for a readership of art historians of the baroque. Its aims and intellectual scope are wider than that. It aims to rethink 'baroque', a term currently of considerable scholarly interest, from outside periodization, and only partially in relation to what is conventionally termed 'baroque art'. Essays presented here provide readers with stimulating considerations of baroque, as both stylistic and period term, and of baroque as operative system. Thus the book as a whole indicates not only the promise and potential of baroque as both stylistic term and mode of thought, but the hazards of assuming an easy coalescence between them. It offers art and architectural historians, historians, and students of literature and philosophy a series of provocative studies and reflections on the question of the relationships between architectural style, form, space, ornamentation, period, the politics of history and emotional investment in form.

This book presents ten chapters, each of which rethinks the baroque problematic, though they do so in a variety of ways. It is divided into six sections: 'Introduction', 'Baroque as Style', 'Rethinking Baroque Art History', 'Baroque Traditions', 'Benjamin's Baroque' and 'Baroque Folds'. My essay, 'The Baroque: The Grit in the Oyster of Art History', introduces the volume

by tracing briefly the etymology of the term 'baroque', before exploring the implications of more recent formulations for the study of artworks that conventionally have been termed baroque. Thus it sketches on a small scale the operative pattern of the book as a whole. Section II offers two essays which dissect the implications of baroque's complicity with style at its inception as a category of art historical analysis. Alina Payne explores the beginnings of baroque historiography which fatefully established the terms within which the question of 'baroque' has long been interrogated and fashioned. Turning to the usually neglected interstices, footnotes and margins of the early formulations of the baroque by Burckhardt and Wölfflin, in particular, Payne focuses on the debate provoked by the 1870 excavation of the Pergamon altar, its display in Berlin in 1879, and the reception of its frieze in particular. She argues that it was the absorption of Hellenistic 'baroque' into an evaluation of Greek art that made possible the positive re-appraisal of its early modern counterpart. The issues raised in the Hellenistic debate, questions of naturalism and the *malerisch*, also formed the crux of the reinterpretation of the shift from Renaissance to baroque. The positive response to the Pergamon marbles thus altered the point of view from which an account of both Greek monumental art and later art was made. By the 1880s *malerisch* was no longer a pejorative term for some art historians, including Burckhardt. Wölfflin responded to the recent debates refining style and period in ancient art in his work on the stylistic transformation between Renaissance and baroque. Furthermore, it was, suggests Payne, Heinrich von Brunn's reading of the Pergamon relief that turned empathy theory into art history and presented Wölfflin with a brilliant model of how it could be done. Thus not only were the aesthetic debates prompted by the Pergamon marbles crucial for Wölfflin's conception and formulation of baroque, but they shaped art history as a discipline.

Howard Caygill's essay examines the way in which the close implication of the concept of style with baroque style in particular produces peculiar historical effects outside the usual European and Christian bounds. Arguing that in *Renaissance and Baroque* Wölfflin's approach is Kantian in that the baroque style is not just a means to understand a group of art works, but also brings it into existence, he considers the framing of 'the Ottoman baroque' and Sinan's architecture in particular in both west European and non-Western scholarship, to inquire as to the nature and limits of the concept of baroque style. He shows that the projection of an Ottoman baroque style contributed to the production of a romantic Orientalism which served to prompt further investigation into 'oriental baroque style'. Thus his essay sheds light on the ways in which notions of style and influence caused artworks that were culturally, historically and geographically diverse to cohere.

Section III, 'Rethinking Baroque Art History', presents two essays by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Claire Farago which address disciplinary problematics within and through the baroque. The first of these is a personal reminiscence by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, a scholar who has perhaps done more than any other to open to Western scholarship huge geographical ranges of Central and Eastern European baroque architecture. It traces his own discomfiture with the term 'baroque' and offers a valuable insight into the politics of the term in US academic art history, in particular from the 1960s to the present. Claire Farago's essay calls for a reconsideration of baroque art history in ethical terms through a Benjaminian conception of the relationship between art history and cultural history. She shares some of the concerns delineated in Caygill's essay, particularly the problem of the European geographical and cultural conceptions underlying 'baroque', and argues that, despite their apparent engagement with, for instance, 'the exotic' or the 'New World', baroque studies continue to suffer from a systemic failure to address the epistemological underpinnings of the field. Deleuze's model of deterritorialization, she suggests, might offer ways through the impasse of hierarchical and static models, such as cultural 'centres' and peripheries, which are still at the heart of baroque studies and continue to fashion its prevailing preoccupations.

Section IV, 'Baroque Traditions', consists of two essays which remain within a traditional periodization of art history but re-invigorate overlooked questions, specifically of technique. Anthony Geraghty's essay, while resting within a traditional conceptualization of the baroque as both style and period, revisits Hawksmoor's architectural drawings in relation to affect. Glenn Adamson treats the baroque, specifically baroque technique, as a vantage point to enquire into the rococo. His essay argues the case for a periodization, not of style, but of craft skill, and in particular for rococo as a designation of a particular mid eighteenth-century attitude to craft skill. Arguing for a closer attention to specific materialities, Adamson investigates rococo craft skill as a means to subsume the real into the artificial, and suggests that rococo style is the form of a triumph over material resistance itself.

Section V, 'Benjamin's Baroque', presents a singular examination of Walter Benjamin's baroque. Andrew Benjamin examines the problem of historical differentiation or distinctness through the prism of Walter Benjamin's work. He explores the relationship between forms of periodization and historical time through a consideration of the work of limit and form in the treatment of 'fate' and 'melancholia', crucial to Benjamin's presentation of the baroque in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and to his undoing of the naturalization of historical time.

The final section, 'Baroque Folds', encompasses two essays that depend in contrasting ways on the Deleuzian fold. Mieke Bal suggests that current interest in the baroque acts out a vision, itself baroque, that vacillates between the subject and object of that vision, thereby altering the status of both. Her essay, 'Baroque Matters', uses 'baroque' to refer, not to a style or period, but to a mode of vision that is potentially useful in resisting tendencies to repress

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history or to mobilize it glibly for political ends. She takes four contemporary artworks to explore the productiveness of such an approach, presenting the relationship between past and present in 'almost hallucinatory' terms. For Bal, the contemporary artworks recast older works, allowing their retrospective revision and upsetting any easy conception of history as linear. Through an examination of the materiality at play in Ann Janssens' *Aerogel 2* and Doris Salcedo's *Unland* in relation to time and form, Bal explores the claim that contemporary art that revisits certain baroque figural principles does so to bind epistemology to a commitment to the social, as a political aesthetic. Tom Conley draws on Deleuze's approach to the historical origins and development of the baroque as a prescient way of thinking about space, ways of reasoning and seeing that characterize the modern age, particularly with regard to the question of point of view, or sensation. In a dazzling reading, Conley traces a baroque process of folding in various cartographic forms, through Montaigne's self-reflection in *Essais*, through topographical drawings of mountains made for Henry IV, and through a cartographic reflection in Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*, cartographies that implicate the viewer in terms of power, strategy, logistics, boundaries, state-building and introspection, to show how map can become 'diagram'.

Running through the book is a tension between the baroque as a mode of organization and the baroque as historical periodization – a tension produced by divergence between essays, explicated within some of the chapters, and implicated by the book as a whole. It is with that tension, as much as to the various responses to it, that this book is concerned. I hope that these chapters and the tensions between them will be as stimulating for the reader as they have been for me.

Notes

1. On the whole, specialist studies tend to avoid the term, while broad-brush surveys have been more inclined to retain it.

2. Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 69 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972); Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le baroque*, trans. Tom Conley, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: The Athlone Press, 1993); Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *La folie du voir: de l'esthétique baroque* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1986); Hubert Damisch, 'Narcise Baroque?', in Christine Buci-Glucksmann (ed.), *Puissance du Baroque: les forces, les formes, les rationalités* (Paris: Galilée, 1996); Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage, 1994); Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Le baroque littéraire: théorie et pratiques: actes du colloque* (Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1990).

3. 'Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars – neither their concepts nor their laws', that is, ideas do not contribute to knowledge of phenomena. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), p. 34.

4. Mieke Bal, 'Ecstatic Aesthetics', in Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (eds), *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and out of History* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Nicolas Gryer and Walter Moser, *Résurgences Baroques* (Brussels: Lettre volée, 2001); Buci-Glucksmann, *Puissance du Baroque*; Buci-Glucksmann, *Le baroque littéraire*. Amongst historians, too, there has been a renewed engagement with the term, particularly as a means to interrogate cultural politics of Latin America and old world–new world inter-relationships (for example, 'Religion in the Hispanic Baroque: The First Atlantic Culture and Its Legacy' International Conference, May 2010, University of Liverpool, UK).

5. Most have responded to the work of Gilles Deleuze, including *Le pli* and *Mille Plateaux*, vol. 2 of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1988); *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), such as: Greg Lynn, *Animate Form* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999); Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000), which critically addresses the usual readings of Deleuze's 'fold' to expose its greater complexities. However, Vidler concentrates on modern and contemporary architecture to expound the problem. On neo-baroque, see: Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), originally published as *L'Età neobarocca* (Rome: Editore Latterza, 1987); Angela Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004). To date, the scholarship engaged with 'neo-baroque' fails to address non-contemporary issues.

6. Mieke Bal is among the few scholars who have straddled this divide. See especially *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999) and *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996). But see also Giovanni Careri, *Bernini: Flights of Love, the Art of Devotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). For some theorists, the term 'baroque' has become almost synonymous with complexity, lack of linear development and resisting metanarrative. See Chunglin Kwa, 'Romantic and Baroque Conceptions of Complex Wholes in the Sciences', in John Law and Annemarie Mol (eds), *Complexities: Social Studies of Knowledge Practices* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 23–54.

7. Many such surveys exist. Indeed, within art history the perpetuation of the concept of the baroque has been based almost entirely on such encompassing frameworks. See, for instance, Rolf Toman, *Die Kunst des Barock: Architektur, Skulptur, Malerei* (Köln: Könemann, 1997); Henry Millon, *The Triumph of the Baroque: Architecture in Europe 1600–1750* (London: Rizzoli, 1999); Robert Harbison, *Reflections on Baroque* (London: Reaktion, 2000); [Victoria and Albert Museum], *Baroque 1620–1800: Style and the Age of Magnificence* (London: V&A, 2009).